

UNDERSTANDING PRETEENS

Generation Alpha: Understanding Their Unique Characteristics and How We Can Meet Their Needs.

UNDERSTANDING GENERATION ALPHA

1. 2010-2024 (0-14 years)

2. Digital Natives: Born into Technology

3. Covid-19

Experts tell us that the age at which we're exposed to a traumatic event determines the depth of its manifestation in our soul.

Isolation – Quarantining; Remote learning

Dependence on Technology – school, childcare

4. Mental Health Issues

- Lonely even though “engaged.”
- Depression, Anxiety, Suicide.

Gen Z Study: 1,000 Participants

- 20% of them say they have a regular therapist.
- 57% take regular medication.
- 39% attend therapy for mental health issues once a week.
- More than 2 in 5 of the country's 68 million Gen Zers have a clinically diagnosed mental health condition.
- 9 in 10 say they struggle specifically with anxiety.
- 8 in 10 say they fight against frequent bouts of depression.
- Most medicated generation (ADD, ADHD, PTSD)

5. Dysfunctional Families

“Gone is the idea of a “normal” family. Nearly half of our kids will see their parents' marriage dissolve. Many will grow up in a fatherless home.” George Barna.

- 2 Income Families
- Absent Father – physically or emotionally
- Shared Custody
- Blended Families
- Unbelieving Parent/s

UNDERSTANDING PRETEENS

1. Developmental Changes

a) Physical Development

b) Mental Development

Concrete to Abstract Thinking

Psychologically (with tweens), there's a huge increase in the neurological capacity of kids at this stage of development. There are two times when a human goes through tremendous neurological growth – one is just after infancy, and the other is around 10, 11, and 12. Kids begin to think in more complex ways, they begin to shift from concrete thinking to abstract thinking. William Damon, Stanford University Center on Adolescence

c) A Different Learning Style

Preteens are Visual

- Engage with Videos, Apps, and Games
YouTube is the second most popular search engine on the internet (after Google), but for Generation Alpha, it's number one.
“Why would I read something when I can watch it?”
- Touch Screens
- Hands-on
- Experiential
- Short Attention Spans

Education is Changing!

2. Emotional/Social Shift

- Egocentric
- Dramatic Mood Swings
- Increased Peer Influence
- Desire for Independence from Family
- Feel Invincible
- Very Critical of Others
- Identity Issues – Gender.

3. Spiritual Changes

“After high school seniors, tweens are the second largest group of people to leave the church and never come back.” UNC-Chapel Hill study by Southern Baptist Convention

a) Begin to question beliefs.

b) Cognitive Pruning

- Is this information worth retaining?
- Is church useful or not?
- Is the Bible really true, or is it just a bunch of fairytales?
- Do I have time for this, or are the other interests in my life more valuable?

c) Sensitive to Hypocrisy

d) Stronger focus on Morality – Rules, Justice. Judgmental of others, not themselves.

4. We are Losing Them

PRETEEN MINISTRY – THEY NEED THEIR OWN CLASS!

1. Remove the Obstacles: Rebuild Trust by Recapturing Them

- Overcome Hypocrisy: Model Integrity
- Break Down Barriers: Meet Their “Pre-Faith” Needs
- Welcome Them: Use Entertainment to Engender a Sense of Belonging
- Love Them: Balance Fun with Relationships.

2. Adapt the Content: Restore Relevance by Answering Them

“Without answers, they are left with questions, leading them to believe that the Bible and the church are irrelevant... Unfortunately, research finds that sixty percent of the students who grow up in the Church have lost that connection” (Ken Ham and Britt Beemer).

a) Reestablish Objective Truth:

I'm OK. You're OK. If it feels good, do it.
Truth is however you define it.
Faith is OK, if it works for you.

How do we address this idea of relative truth?
While the world tells us that everything is relative, that is not exactly accurate. Everyone believes in some level of absolute truth, even if they don't want to admit it.

We all agree that murder is wrong. To believe this, we must have accepted some level of truth, some definition of good and evil.

Everyone has a limit to their “relativism.”
If you press them, they will eventually have to admit that all beliefs have consequences. There will be fallout eventually, and “truth” will be there in the end. Back them into a corner, and that's where we find truth.
That's where we find God.

b) Teach Biblical Apologetics

Of those who have left the church, believing it to be irrelevant, two groups exist: those who say that the Bible is irrelevant and those who think that the Church is irrelevant (Ken Ham and Britt Beemer).

▶ Resolve the Truth Questions: Is the Bible Trustworthy?

Scientific objections about the Bible's reliability.

- How do we know that the Bible is true?
- Where does God come from?
- What about Evolution
- How can I know that God exists?
- Do all religions lead to the same place?
- Are science and Christianity enemies?

▶ Answer the Life Questions: Is God Trustworthy?

Reality questions about God's reliability.

- If God is real, why does evil exist?
- How can God forgive murderers?
- How could a good God send people to hell?
- How can I believe in a good God when there is so much suffering?
- Was Jesus really God

▶ Address the Cultural Questions: Who am I?

Honest questions about my worth and purpose.

- Who am I?
- Do I matter?
- Do I have a purpose?
- Do people like me?

3. Model a Biblical Worldview.

As believers, our responsibility is to demonstrate truth by modeling a life that invites questions and builds credibility. We need to live out God's truth in a way that they cannot ignore.

"Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."
Matthew 5:16 (ESV).

"Our entire culture (including secular schools) is aggressively teaching the apologetics of evolution and secular humanism. They teach our students how to defend a humanistic worldview, and they model that worldview. They show all the reasons that what they are teaching is supposedly true.

The secularists are teaching our children how to defend the secular faith and connecting it to the real world—and here we are in churches teaching wonderful Bible stories and reinforcing in their minds that they can believe the secularists and that the Bible is not really connected to the real world. No wonder we are losing them...

(Answers in Genesis).

4. Clarify the Message: Encourage Belief by Convincing Them

Children are born with the notion that they are invincible and indestructible. The truth is that death doesn't discriminate. Coffins come in all sizes.

"Nones" = "no religion."
They no longer believe.
Either God doesn't exist, or He doesn't matter.

- The "nones" are now the fastest-growing group in the United States, and surprisingly, 78 percent of them admit that they actually grew up in church (pewresearch.org).
- Thirteen percent of Gen Z kids say they are atheists; 37 percent say you can't know for sure if God is real; and 58 percent say there is more than one way to God (Barna.com).
- Twenty-six percent view the Bible as a book of fables, legends, and history (christianpost.com), and devastatingly, 19 percent say they don't believe in God (gallop.com).

- Of the 81 percent who believe in God, half of them say that the “god’ they believe in is not the God of the Bible (pewresearch.org).

a. Persuade Them: Prioritize the Gospel

b. Retain Them: Develop Disciples

5. Adjust the Methods: Influence Them by Engaging Them

- Use Technology
- Use Variety, Movement
- Allow them to Discover
- Allow them to Serve

“. . . I believe the battlefield is found in the minds, hearts, and souls of our children. Imagine yourself as Satan . . . what easier way to inflict the maximum possible pain upon God than by winning over His beloved creatures from the earliest possible moment, resulting in a lifetime of unrighteous behavior by those creatures? Win them early, and the job is all but finished.” Barna, George.

“When You See Fireflies – Equipping Parents and Leaders to Minister Effectively to Generation Alpha.”

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